

Message Text

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S E C R E T BANGKOK 8143

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MARR, CB, VS

SUBJECT: DISPOSITION OF FORMER GVN AND GKR US-SUPPLIED
MILITARY EQUIPMENT

1. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI ASKED ME TO SEE HIM MAY 6 TO DISCUSS THE DISPOSITION OF U.S.-PROVIDED MILITARY EQUIPMENT, NOW IN THAILAND, WHICH FORMERLY BELONGED TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA. OPENING THE DISCUSSION, CHATCHAI SAID THAT THE OWNERSHIP AND DISPOSAL OF THIS EQUIPMENT HAD BECOME A SENSITIVE ISSUE IN THAILAND. THE PRESS WAS CONCERNED THAT THE THAI GOVERNMENT WAS NOT ASSERTING ITS AUTHORITY BY SEIZING THESE ITEMS AND THE ISSUE HAD ALSO BEEN PICKED UP BY THE LEADING OPPOSITION DEMOCRAT PARTY. AS A RESULT, THE CABINET HAD DECIDED THAT MORNING TO ORDER THE SUSPENSION OF FURTHER REMOVALS OF THIS EQUIPMENT FROM THAILAND UNTIL THE RTG DECIDES ON ITS DISPOSITION.

2. CHAT CHAI SAID THE CABINET HAD ALSO INSTRUCTED HIM TO OBTAIN A COPY OF OUR MAP AGREEMENTS WITH THE GVN AND THE GKR IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH WHETHER OR NOT THESE AGREEMENTS DO INDEED PROVIDE FOR THE RETURN OF THIS EQUIPMENT TO USG CONTROL. I REMINDED CHATCHAI THAT I
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HAD ALREADY PROVIDED HIM WITH THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE

AGREEMENTS IN WRITING, BUT HE WANTS VERBATIM TEXTS IN ORDER TO USE THESE WITH THE THAI PUBLIC TO JUSTIFY RETURNING THE EQUIPMENT TO USG CONTROL. WITH THIS IN HAND, PLUS THE FACT THAT THESE PLANES LEFT SAIGON BEFORE SURRENDER OF THE GVN TO BE RETURNED TO US, HE HOPES TO BE ABLE TO HANDLE PUBLIC OPINION ON THIS MATTER AND LET US PROCEED WITH DISPOSAL OF THE EQUIPMENT AS WE WISH.

3. I TOLD CHATCHAI THAT, AS HE WAS AWARE, WE HAD THE APPROVAL OF THE THAI SUPREME COMMAND TO BRING THE PLANES INTO THAILAND AND ALSO TO BEGIN THE OUTWARD MOVEMENT. CHATCHAI AGREED BUT SAID HE DID NOT WANT TO DISCUSS THIS ASPECT OF THE SITUATION BUT RATHER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PLANES NOW. I SAID THAT A NUMBER HAD ALREADY LEFT. HE ASKED SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE MIDWAY, AND I TOLD HIM THAT IT HAD SAILED LAST NIGHT WITH A NUMBER OF PLANES ON BOARD UNDER APPROVAL FROM THE SUPREME COMMAND. CHATCHAI DID NOT OBJECT TO THIS BUT SAID THE CABINET DECISION APPLIES ONLY TO THOSE AIRCRAFT AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT STILL IN THAILAND.

4. I BRIEFED CHATCHAI ON THE EQUIPMENT WE HAD DECIDED TO TURN OVER TO THE RTG FROM THESE FORMER SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN ASSETS AND SAID THE CABINET ACTION WOULD HAVE AN EFFECT ON THIS DECISION. (WE WILL DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH SUPREME COMMAND SOONEST.) I NOTED ALSO THAT IT WOULD NOT BE IN THAILAND'S OWN INTEREST TO TURN THIS FORMER GVN EQUIPMENT OVER TO THE COMMUNISTS--CHATCHAI IMMEDIATELY AGREED, NOTING THAT SOME DAY THEY MIGHT USE IT TO STRAFE DON MUANG AIRPORT OUTSIDE BANGKOK.

5. I ASKED CHATCHAI ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS HAD REQUESTED THE RETURN OF THIS EQUIPMENT. HE SAID THE RTG HAD RECEIVED THREE LETTERS, ONE FROM HANOI AND TWO FROM THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT IN SAIGON. THE LETTER FROM HANOI, DELIVERED THROUGH THEIR RESPECTIVE EMBASSIES IN VIENTIANE, REQUESTED THE RETURN OF ALL MILITARY EQUIPMENT REMOVED BY THE FORMER GOVERNMENT IN SAIGON. CHATCHAI SAID THE RTG HAD REPLIED THAT IT WOULD BE WILLING TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER WITH WHATEVER GOVERNMENT WAS ESTAB-

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LISHED IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

6. CHATCHAI SAID THE THAI THEN RECEIVED TWO SEPARATE MESSAGES FROM THE PRG MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (NO NAME WAS GIVEN). THESE WERE FORWARDED VIA HANOI BY THE VIENTIANE ROUTE. THE FIRST MESSAGE REQUESTED THE RTG TO PROTECT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE EMBASSY AND PROPERTY IN BANGKOK. THE SECOND, LIKE THE EARLIER MESSAGE FROM HANOI, REQUESTED

RETURN OF THE MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND OFFERED TO SEND A "CADRE" TO BANGKOK TO DISCUSS THE MATTER. I NOTED THAT THERE WERE SOME OTHER CADRES IN THAILAND WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY WISH TO DISCUSS WITH THE PRG, BUT CHATCHAI DID NOT PICK UP THIS POINT. CHATCHAI REGARDS RECEIPT OF THE TWO MESSAGES FROM THE PRG AS TANTAMOUNT TO RECOGNITION AND BELIEVES THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE.

7. AFTER SOME ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION BACK AND FORTH, I TOLD CHATCHAI THAT IN RESPONSE TO HIS OFFICIAL REQUEST WE WOULD SUSPEND THE OUTWARD MOVEMENT OF THIS EQUIPMENT BUT THAT I MUST REASSERT STRONGLY THE POSITION OF MY GOVERNMENT THAT THESE ITEMS WERE AND REMAIN THE PROPERTY OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND MY HOPE THAT WE COULD RESOLVE THE ISSUE QUICKLY.

8. COMMENT: BY WHIPPING UP PUBLIC OPINION AND BY JUDICIOUS USE OF PRESS LEAKS, CHATCHAI AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE SUCCEEDED IN GETTING CABINET APPROVAL FOR THEIR DESIRE, OBVIOUS FROM THE OUTSET, TO RETAIN THIS EQUIPMENT AS A BARGAINING PAWN WITH HANOI AND POSSIBLY THE NEW GOVERNMENT IN SAIGON. FORTUNATELY, THE MIDWAY SAILED LAST NIGHT WITH THE BULK OF THE EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT ON BOARD. I AM DEEPLY INDEBTED TO ALL THOSE INVOLVED IN LOADING THE SHIP UNDER SUCH DIFFICULT CONDITIONS. THE FACT THAT THE MAJOR ITEMS ARE NOW OUT OF THAILAND CONSIDERABLY REDUCES THE POLITICAL PROBLEM WE FACE.

9. WE WILL ENLIST THE HELP OF SUPREME COMMAND AND START BUILDING BACKFIRES HERE. REQUEST SOONEST BY TELEGRAM EXTRACTS FROM U.S. MILITARY AID AGREEMENTS WITH THE GVN AND GKR CONCERNING REVERSION OF TITLE TO U.S. WITH FULL TEXTS OF
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AGREEMENTS TO FOLLOW BY FASTEST POSSIBLE MEANS. WOULD WELCOME ALSO ANY ADDITIONAL ARGUMENTATION ON THIS MATTER WE CAN USE WITH CHATCHAI AND OTHERS.
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